



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Distribution

April 16, 2008

Thomas P. O'Brien

United States Attorney
Central District of California

Thom Mrozek, Public Affairs Officer
(213) 894-6947
thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov
www.usdoj.gov/usao/cac

PRESIDENT OF CAMBODIAN OPPOSITION GROUP CONVICTED OF PLOTING TO OVERTHROW CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT

The president of the Cambodian Freedom Fighters – a Long Beach, California-based organization that was formed to seize political control in the southeast Asian country – was found guilty today of conspiring to kill in a foreign country.

Yasith Chhun, 51, a United States citizen, was found guilty of four felony charges at the conclusion of a 10-day trial. In addition to the conspiracy to kill in a foreign country count, the jury convicted Chhun of conspiracy to destroy property in a foreign country, conspiracy to violate the Neutrality Act by engaging in a military expedition against a nation with whom the United States is at peace and conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction in a foreign country.

The evidence presented at trial showed that Chhun traveled to the Cambodia-Thailand border in October 1998 to meet with Cambodian military personnel who were opposed to the ruling party in Cambodia, the Cambodia People's Party, headed by Prime Minister Hun Sen. At this time, the Cambodian Freedom Fighters (CFF) was born and Chhun was made president of the group. The opposition forces from Cambodia agreed to acquire weapons and Chhun agreed to raise funds for the violent overthrow of the Cambodian government. Fundraisers were held at the Queen Mary in Long Beach, and strategy meetings were held at Chhun's office in Long Beach.

The CFF eventually developed plans for "Operation Volcano," which would

be a major assault on Cambodian government institutions and Prime Minister Sen. Documents introduced as evidence in the trial contained notations by Chhun that he would “tear Hun Sen” apart, “cut their necks,” and “send them to hell soon.”

On November 24, 2000, Chhun orchestrated the attack on the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, which included attacks on buildings housing the Ministry of Defense, the Council of Ministers and a military headquarters facility. About 200 CFF members used AK-47 rifles, grenades and rockets during the assault. As a result of the attack, several Cambodian police officers and civilians were wounded, and at least three CFF members were killed.

Seven witnesses came from Cambodia to testify. One of the victims who was 20 years old on the night of the attack said he was guarding a gas station when CFF members armed with AK-47s approached him. Even though he told the CFF members that he was unarmed, the witness testified that they shot him and then threw a grenade at him.

Chhun is scheduled to be sentenced by United States District Judge Dean D. Pregerson on September 8. He faces a potential sentence of life without parole in federal prison.

The investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and IRS-Criminal Investigation.

Chhun and his wife, Sras Pech, 42, are named in a second indictment that accuses them of running a fraudulent tax-preparation business in Long Beach. They are scheduled to go on trial in that case on July 1.

CONTACT: Assistant United States Attorney Lamar Baker
(213) 894-0627

Assistant United States Attorney Richard Y. Lee
(213) 894-2692